“***The Whole Life***” by S. Finlan, at The First Church, Dec. 24, 2020

There were several people who received special knowledge about the special status of this child. Besides Joseph, Mary, Zechariah, and Elizabeth, there were the two saintly singers Simeon and Anna who frequented the temple, and there were the wise men from the East, the magi, who may have been Persian priests, which is what “magi” technically means. They were stargazers, and there was a great conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation Pisces in 7 b.c., possibly the astronomic event that underlies the story of the Christmas Star. We are having one of these rare conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn right now. But I think there was something more than just astrology that lead these magi to think that a special Jewish king was going to be born. Some kind of revelation from God must have been given to them. Once they arrived in Judaea, they learned from Jewish scribes of a prophecy from Micah about a ruler to be born in Bethlehem.

It is fascinating to see that men and women, Jews and Gentiles, were alerted to the significance of the birth of this baby. The old guy who hung around the Temple, Simeon, said that this baby was destined to be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32). And that was true. Simeon’s faith may have inspired others, too. As we know, Jesus’ whole life was an incomparable revelation of truth and faithfulness. His life is a subject for the most meaningful study, yielding psychological, moral, and spiritual insights. Who has not felt inspiration when reading Jesus’ messages?

It is the whole life of Jesus that exerts a saving influence upon us, not just a singular moment in his life. This is one of the values of Christmas: that it impels us to honor the *whole* life of Jesus. So wherever we are, whether at home in quiet meditation, or carefully going to social occasions, we can reflect on the Savior, his spiritual insight, his brilliant stories, his knowledge of the Bible, his kindness to poor and crippled people, his unceasing trust in the Father, and all of it beginning with his birth as a baby, recognized and honored by a few people who were granted a revelation about the special identity of this baby. Paying attention to the birth is a way of saying that his whole life mattered, right from the beginning. Christians sometimes put too much emphasis on Jesus’ death, but it was his whole life that had a saving effect on humanity. He saves us because of *who he is*, not because of what was done to him. Who he is is the Divine Son who became human to live a whole human life from birth to death to resurrection from the dead. Through his life, he exalts and sanctifies each stage of human life, from infancy to childhood to manhood. Each of us is loved by Jesus at each stage of life, as we grow in Spirit and in love.

There have been many moments of spiritual importance in your life, memories have been made, and more will be made in the future. Let us be inspired by our faith in God’s love as revealed in the life of Jesus. We have received love; let us share God’s love with one another, an everlasting love woven with hope, joy, and peace. As Jesus said, “My peace I give to you. . . Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid” (John 14:27).

Let us go forward tonight ready to receive God’s love and God’s gift to us, the life of Jesus. Let us be inspired by the lovingkindness of the Father as shown to us through the life of Jesus Christ. May peace be with you in all fullness throughout this Christmas season.